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AUTHOR Galbraith, Lynn
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ABSTRACT

An internal evaluation was carried out on the governing procedures of the Center for Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln during the spring semester, 1985-86. The evaluation focused on the major governance committee within the Center (the Center Executive Committee) and its relationship with the two other forms of governance within the center--faculty meetings and the Graduate Committee. The Committee had not been evaluated since it was formed in 1981 to join the former two Departments of Secondary and Elementary Education. The Center was searching for a new Director during this period, and was also subjected to reallocation and economic changes that were taking place within the College and the University. The evaluation uncovered a number of levels of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the governance procedures by the faculty. It also raised the following issues about the evaluation: (1) the credibility of the evaluator; (2) the actual interview format and treating all subjects equally; (3) the confidentiality and nonidentification of individuals; (4) honesty in the veracity and accuracy of the interviews; (5) objectivity in directing and documenting the interviews; and (6) the professional integrity demonstrated throughout the evaluation. (Author/JAZ)

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# Evaluating the Governance Structure of a College Department:

## Processes and Issues

Lynn Galbraith
Instructor
Center for Curriculum and Instruction
13, Henzlik Hall
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

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Evaluating the Governance Structure of a College Department:

Processes and Issues.


## Abstract

This paper discusses an evaluation that was carried out on the governing procedures of the Center for Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln during the Spring semester, 1985-86. The internal evaluation focused on the major governance committee within the Center (the Center Executive Committee) and its relationship with the two other forms of governance within the Center -- faculty meetings and the Graduate Committee. The Committee had not been evaluated since it was formed in 1981 to join the former two Departments of Secondary and Elementary Education. The Center was searching for a new Director during this period, and was also subjected to the reallocation and economic changes that were taking place within the College and the University.

The evaluation uncovered a number of levels of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the governance procedures by the faculty. It also raised a a number of issues about, for example; (a) the credibility of the evaluator; (b) the actual interview format and treating all subjects equally; (c) the confidentiality and non-identification of individuals; (d) honesty in the veracity and accuracy of the interviews; (e) objectivity in directing and documenting the interviews; and (f) the professional integrity demonstrated throughout the evaluation.

This paper focuses on the processes and issues involved in an internal evaluation that was carried out on the governing structure within the Center for Curriculum and Instruction, Teachers College, at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, during the spring semester 1985-1986. The paper proposes to (a) give a brief perspective of the Center and its governance structure; (b) to discuss the processes involved in the evaluation; and (c) to look at the issues that surfaced during the evaluation.

## Overall Perspective

The Center for Curriculum and Instruction is one of seven Departments in Teachers College. The Center was established in 1980, by combining the previously independent departments of Secondary and Elementary Education. The Center had (at that time) twenty eight full-time tenure line faculty, five non-tenured instructors and a number of graduate teaching assistants. The Center is responsible for over 1100 undergraduate and 400 graduate students who are enrolled in undergraduate and graduate courses. This internal evaluation focused on the major governance committee within the Center --the Center Executive Committee— and its relationship with the other two forms of governance within the Center — the Graduate Committee and faculty meetings. This was the first evaluation of the Center Executive Committee since is formation in 1981. The Center was searching for a new Director during this period, and was also subjected to the reallocation and economic changes that were taking place within the College and the University at large.

The Center Executive Committee consists of six elected faculty members, two students, and the Director of the Center. The terms of office are for two year

periods. All Curriculum and Instruction faculty are eligible to serve on the Committee. The Committee was formed as the main form of government, when the two former Departments of Elementary and Secondary Education merged. Some of the responsibilities of the Center Executive Committee are (a) to develop policies for the organization, operations, and administration of the Center for Curriculum & Instruction; (b) to serve as the Curriculum Committee; (c) to serve as the Personnel Committee; (d) to serve as the Student Appeals Committee; (d) to advise the Director on the conduct of his/her responsibilities; and (e) to serve as the long-term planning committee for Curriculum & Instruction.

There are two other means for faculty input into the decision-making in the Center. The first being faculty meetings - these have been replaced by the Center Executive Committee and have occurred occasionally during each semester; and second the Graduate Committee - which is responsible for administering the graduate requirements and curriculum within the Center.

The evaluator was in the second year of an instructorship within the Center. The position is a faculty, but non-tenured line. The evaluator was, and is, concurrently working on a doctorate in the Center for Curriculum & Instruction. The evaluation was carried out as a practicum requirement for an Evaluation course at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

## Processes

### Methodology

The evaluator conducted open-faced and confidential interviews with a sample of twenty two interviewees, including the Director and two graduate students, who are eligible to serve on the Center Executive Committee. The faculty included full-time instructors from within the various instructor and

professorial ranks in Curriculum and Instruction, and past and current members of the Center Executive Committee, and the Graduate Committee. The interviews were conducted separately, except in one instance when two faculty were interviewed together. The interviews centered around five evaluation questions. At first each faculty member was asked open-ended questions about their feelings towards and perceptions of the Center Executive Committee and the governance structure in general. The evaluator then asked more structured questions as the interview proceeded about the governance process. All the interviewees were asked similar questions and within the same format. The evaluator made written notes during the interviews.

This responsive evaluation approach (Stake 1975) was used in order to provide a detailed, descriptive portrayal of the governing processes based on faculty viewpoints and experiences. The evaluator also analyzed the minutes from previous Center Executive meetings. The evaluator discussed the evaluation with the Director during a series of meetings throughout the semester.

The five evaluation questions posed were derived from discussions with the Director. They were as follows; (1) how did the faculty perceive the process used to make decisions during the last five years?; (2) did the Center Executive Committee meet the needs it was created for?; (3) how effective was the Center Executive Committee been in making decisions and recommendations in the last five years?; (4) what is the place of faculty meetings in the governance structure of the Center?; and (5) what role does the Graduate Committee serve in the governance structure of the Center, and how does its functions differ from those of the Center Executive Committee?

### Faculty Responses

A final written report was presented to the Director and the current members of the Center Executive Committee at the end of the evaluation. Briefly, the faculty raised a wide variety of concerns about the governance procedures. These responses ranged from satisfaction to dissatisfaction with the governance structure, and its effectiveness within the Center, and the levels of decision-making and recommendations made over the years. The level of effectiveness appeared to depend on each individual faculty member's perception and satisfaction with the Central Executive Committee and its decisions, and on the agenda that the Director brought to the Committee.

It also appeared that issues presented at the College and University levels may have played an important part in the general effectiveness of the Committee — especially during the last few years. An analysis of the Committee's past minutes indicated that issues have been addressed and reported on by the Committee, although there were gaps in the minutes in places, for example, in relation to whether recommendations were actually followed up on by the faculty at large, as well as reports on promotion and tenure issues.

## Issues

### Credibility

The issue of credibility was raised during the evaluative processes. As stated earlier the evaluator was a graduate student, with instructor status in the Center which is comprised of twenty eight faculty who range in status from instructors to senior professors. Although, the evaluator was treated respectfully, it was difficult to ascertain how the interviewees perceived the

evaluator during the evaluation. It is possible that they felt that she had little evaluation experience.

The faculty were also informed that the evaluation was a practicum requirement for a professor who is highly regarded in the college, thus this association may have increased the evaluator's credibility, as well as the professorial ethic that faculty must work with and help students. However, the faculty did discuss the issues with the evaluator, and some conversations lasted more than an hour. It seems unlikely that they would have given the evaluator their time, unless they saw some value to the evaluation and that they wanted their opinions expressed. In many ways, this evaluation provided a channel through which faculty could express their opinions privately.

The acting Director, however, felt that the evaluator was probably the most logical candidate for conducting the evaluation. She was only in her second year as a non-tenured faculty member, and really did not have any axes to grind, would not "tell tales" about the subjects, and also knew little about the political nuances of the Center. The evaluator had had little contact with many of the interviewees, although she had worked specifically with three of the faculty. The evaluator felt that she would be impartial, as she would not remain as part of the Center indefinitely.

Since the Director was acting in an interim capacity, he had little to lose. He wanted the governance structure evaluated, so that a report on the present state of affairs could be passed onto the new incumbent. The Center had no inbuilt or mandatory means for internal evaluation, yet the Director firmly believed that after five years, it was time to re-evaluate the position of the governance structure.

Interview format

This is an issue that was raised as the interviews progressed. It was important to maintain a similar format and treat all interviewees equally and to maintain impartiality. The interviews were conducted confidentially and behind closed doors. The actual questions were generally open-ended at first, as the evaluator wanted each subject to present how they saw the governance of the Department from their own point of view. Specific questions were then asked, if the subject had not answered questions related to the evaluation. Each subject was fully informed about the nature of the interviews in order to establish rapport. In this case, all of the interviewees were told that this was a practicum requirement for an evaluation course.

A number of problems surfaced as the interviews progressed: (a) the evaluator had to remain impartial, and not be drawn into the discussion by subjects who were either excited by the issues and wanted to include the evaluator in the discussion, or were less willing to forward information, (some faculty were very forthcoming, others felt that they had little to say); and (b) the interviews were documented in the form of written notes, and so it was difficult to write down the subjects' perceptions, as well as keep abreast of the nuances and cues that were taking place within the interview.

This note taking format was used, as the evaluator felt that tape recorded interviews —although more accurate (Patton, 1982)— were not warranted in this situation. She wanted the subjects to feel at ease, and not be threatened by the notion that the recordings could be replayed elsewhere, and listened to by other faculty. Also it seemed inappropriate to tape record senior professors.

The interviews also aroused the curiosity of the subjects. They wanted to hear how the evaluation was progressing at a later date, and would stop the

evaluator occasionally and ask how the evaluation was progressing. Thus in many ways, the subjects realized that they had a stake in the evaluation process.

Confidentiality

This was an issue that surfaced, and every effort was made to maintain the confidentiality of the subjects. Each subject was promised that they would remain anonymous in the report and discussions with the Director. What was interesting though, is that in many ways during the interviews, certain faculty would present the evaluator with ideas that they and others shared, and other faculty names were disclosed. It was obvious that faculty did discuss issues concerning the Center, outside the evaluation interviews. In many ways there were pockets of collegiality that were suggested in the interviews. Also, the Director had moved to his position through the ranks and knew the faculty, and so the evaluator suspects that on some issues the evaluator may have been able to ascertain which faculty members might hold certain viewpoints. This might be an issue in internal evaluations that are conducted on groups of people who work closely together in institutions. Certainly, in higher education, faculty do voice their opinions and discontent (especially those with the security of tenure) over coffee and in the corridors.

The particular Center was also subject to economic reallocation measures that were taking place throughout the University as a whole. Faculty were disgruntled about external issues and pressures that were taking place at the Dean's level and beyond, as well as at the Center level. In many ways, the interviews became a sounding board for these issues too.

Honesty

The issue surfaced regarding taking the written comments gleaned from the

interviews, and trying to document them honestly and accurately. The evaluator tried to interpret the interviews and record them in the report. It was difficult to take written notes and synthesize them into the report. The report made use of direct quotations from the faculty, however more emphasis should have been made on them. Tape recordings would have facilitated the recording of personal viewpoints through quotations. Nevertheless, the evaluator made every effort possible to record the interviews as honestly as possible.

Objectivity

The evaluator tried to maintain an objective balance in both directing and documenting the interviews. Again, this was not an easy task as the evaluator did rely on the written notes that she had made during the interviews. The recommendations that were made were based on how the evaluator perceived the evaluation, yet at the same time the recommendations were directly related to the interviews. The recommendations tried to meet the needs of all the faculty members interviewed.

An issue that did arise was one of trying to write the report so that the Director and others were not able to "read between the lines" and so identify the subjects in the report. It was commented on earlier that the evaluator believes that it is more problematic to evaluate the internal workings of a closely-knit group of people.

Professional Integrity

There were a number of issues here, in that the evaluator had to take into account the degree to which certain faculty might employ the interview as a vehicle for relaying personal opinions to the Director, over and above their general satisfaction or dissatisfaction of the governance procedures. It was

mentioned earlier, that the Center was experiencing a number of difficulties, as the Director was acting in an interim capacity, and changes were taking place at the Dean's level and above. It is possible that certain faculty felt threatened by any significant changes that might take place — and so wanted to respect the status quo. Thus, problems that were College-wide, were often voiced by the interviewees. However, it was difficult during that semester to separate College issues from those of the Center. Some faculty felt that they were not being presented with an accurate picture of the decision-making within the Center. It is apparent that budgetary and reallocation issues were of concern to the faculty, and did present issues that had developed since the inception of the Center Executive Committee, and may have not been properly addressed in the evaluation questions. Many faculty believed that a number of key decisions were being made at the Dean's level, and this reflected on the ability of the Center Executive Committee to function according to its original responsibilities.

This issue of integrity was particularly important when the evaluator discussed the evaluation with the Director, and in the written report. The evaluator tried to maintain a sense of professionalism and ethical standards at all times. She did not want to act as a spokesperson for certain parties within the Center.

## Summary

In many ways the evaluation raised more questions than it answered. The Director was pleased with the report — and he has since become the permanent Director of Curriculum and Instruction. Accordingly, there were a number of issues that surfaced during the evaluation, and any future evaluations will need to consider these issues. The use of the interview format does require practice

and time on behalf of the evaluator and the participants. Yet it did provided an adequate means of documenting the insights and perceptions of the faculty within the Center.

## References

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